

## ALBERTA NEWS

### Woodland Caribou Boreal Population in Canada

Submitted by Joseph Hnatiuk, CSEB Regional Director

Woodland caribou (*Rangifer taranus caribou*) are classified as threatened in Alberta. In support of the national *Species at Risk Act*, a Recovery Plan for Woodland Caribou in Alberta was completed in 2004. The provincial plan was developed at a strategic level and it called for local implementation plans to be completed in 5 areas of the province.

In west central Alberta, one of the areas, woodland caribou are typically associated with large contiguous stands of mature (80 + years old) coniferous forest. On provincially administered lands, these types of landscapes have been changing through timber harvest, oil and gas development and fire suppression. The progressive alteration of the large contiguous coniferous forests to younger, more fragmented forests, and climate conditions, short and long term, are thought to have facilitated an increase in primary prey species other than woodland caribou (e.g., moose, elk and deer). In addition, populations of moose, elk and deer over the past 50 years have increased and are meeting management objectives for hunting. These changes have also resulted in higher densities of wolves adjacent to the caribou habitat resulting in more predation on caribou by the wolves. The continued decline in caribou numbers has resulted in the Alberta Government initiating the Alberta Caribou Action and Range Planning Project as part of the Government of Canada's Recovery Strategy.

In that regard, Joseph Hnatiuk, Canadian Society of Environmental Biologists (CSEB) Regional Director for Alberta, has been recently appointed as an alternate member to the Government of Alberta Caribou Action and Range Planning Little Smoky and A La Pêche Caribou Ranges Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group. The Planning Project will prepare range plans for Alberta's caribou ranges and one action plan to meet the requirements of the Government of Canada's Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou Boreal population in Canada. In Alberta, caribou conservation and recovery are also guided by the Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan (2005) and a Woodland Caribou Policy for Alberta (2011).

The mandate of the Advisory Group is to provide strategic advice to the Government of Alberta to inform key requirements related to caribou range planning efforts. Specifically, they will advise on the following:

- Template for Range Plans;
- Baseline information;
- Inventory and assessment of management tools and approaches;
- Planning and key elements for stakeholder workshops.;
- Management options in range plans.

Some guiding principles include the following:

- Range plans will recognize unique conditions where they occur;
- Range plans will be developed in a collaborative manner with First Nations and Metis organizations;
- Range plans will be developed through a variety of engagement mechanisms with key stakeholders;
- Range plans will use sound habitat and population metrics in the setting of priorities and be responsive to evolving caribou populations and landscape conditions;
- Development of range plans will examine a broad range of management tools and approaches, and
- Range plans are sub-regional plans that will be integrated and aligned with regional plans.

The project is expected to be completed in 2014.

### Bounty Payments to Kill Predators in Alberta, Canada.

Submitted by Ludwig Carbyn, CSEB Member

The use of bounty payments was a very widespread wildlife management practice throughout North America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, this practice has declined dramatically, and was largely eliminated in Canada by the early 1970s.

Since 2007, there has been a resurgence of the use of this practice in Alberta to help control wolves and to supplement trapper incomes. The reason for a renewed interest in bounty payments has several other root causes as well. One important reason has been to reduce depredation of livestock in specific areas where wolf, cattle / sheep ranges overlap. There is also a prevailing perception, by various interest groups, that wolf numbers are reducing the opportunities for recreational hunting. Most of the latter areas occur along the foothills of the province.

There are two separate incentive payments in place. The first is the use of public funds (municipal and county jurisdictions). These funds are intended to kill wolves in order to reduce /eliminate depredation of livestock. The second initiative involves private funding from foreign sources, from Alberta Fish and Game, and from local Trapper's Associations. All these efforts were intended to help increase ungulate populations in areas of high, to moderate, human hunting pressures on elk and other ungulates.

Local government incentives included the Municipal Districts of Big Lakes, Bonnyville, and the counties listed are Clear Hills, St. Paul, and Two Hills. These initiatives were of variable duration and extensiveness. Annual payouts varied, and they ranged from \$15 to \$500 per wolf. In some cases coyotes were also included in these programs. The annual payments ranged from \$17,000 to \$106,000 in various areas, although accurate figures are not always available.

Other bounty initiatives involve the use of local and foreign funding to reduce wolf predation pressures on ungulate populations along Alberta's foothills in the Sundre, Rocky Mountain, and Drayton

Valley areas. Funding for the latter programs originated from the Wyoming based Wild Sheep Foundation and was matched by local fish and wildlife groups. Administrative details are worked out by local chapters of the Trapper's Association and the Alberta Fish and Game Association. It appears that the amounts available for the Rocky Mountain and Sundre initiatives were set at about \$9,000 while funding to the Drayton Valley area was less and was funded by fish and wildlife groups. In several cases, the funding from The Sheep Foundation was increased, once original funding ran out, due to a larger number of wolves having been killed than was originally budgeted for.

In Alberta, the official trapping / hunting season on wolves is open from October to the end of March. Wolf fur prices in recent years have been about \$90 to \$150 per hide. Bounties set a higher incentive to kill wolves, resulting in rates of \$300 to \$500 per animal. This certainly made it more lucrative to kill wolves and became a way of subsidizing the harvesting of animals without necessarily utilizing the fur.

All programs in Alberta are spurious, and apparently, not based on any specific detailed research efforts. There are no scientifically based monitoring programs in place to evaluate the effectiveness in reducing livestock / wolf incidences nor are there programs that monitor increases in elk numbers within the areas in question.

According to official Government positions, these programs are in place without any violations of provincial game laws. The provincial Government has publicly stated that they are aware of these activities and that there is no evidence that the bounty systems pose a significant risk to provincial wolf populations. Considering that the wolf population has been estimated to be around 5,000 animals, there is evidence that indeed wolf numbers are not significantly impacted, province wide, by these programs, although local wolf populations may decline as a result of bounty payments. A much more important aspect deals with the status of carnivore conservation within the wildlife management framework.

Bounties rarely solve the problems for which they were intended. Bounty-based killing is usually at random, often not targeted specifically to where the problems exist, and they can be open to abuse and fraud.

Furthermore, it has been repeatedly shown that wolves have high reproductive rates. Therefore, random, low level killing of wolves is not likely to significantly increase ungulate numbers. There is no scientifically established case where bounty payments on wolves in North America has been effective in achieving the desired results.

The most effective method, to achieve ungulate increases, is to have sustained wolf culling programs that involve either aerial gunning or poison. This is being done in the Little Smoky Range at the present time. Also, there is discussion of this for northeastern Alberta to secure caribou populations in conjunction with increasing oil sands development. This is a management tool within the Alberta caribou policy; however, no implementation plan has been developed yet.

The International Union of Nature Conservation – IUCN – is a worldwide conservation organization committed to promoting good stewardship of nature and natural resources. In 1978, IUCN produced a WOLF MANIFESTO. This document was

again revised in 1982. The manifesto acknowledges that there are circumstances where wolf control by man is warranted, but that such actions should be taken under the following conditions:

1. Be temporary and only directed to specific problems areas for limited duration,
2. Be based on strict scientific determination of its need,
3. Be selective and specific to target animals, and
4. Use methods that are discriminatory and with minimal side effects to the ecosystem.

Given the nature and extent of the bounty payments that are currently in place in Alberta, it is recommended that the provincial Government demonstrate leadership in adhering to the best management practises in wildlife management standards according to North American and International standards. The activities currently in place are in direct violation of the IUCN manifesto of the management of wolves within the province of Alberta.

## SASKATCHEWAN News

### Saskatchewan Chapter – Fall 2013 Report

Submitted by Robert Stedwill, CSEB President

There has been very little activity with respect to the Chapter here in Saskatchewan. I have said this before, so it bears repeating, economic activity in Saskatchewan is so intense that the province is being transformed before our very eyes!

Gone are the days when Saskatchewanians were considered “hewers of wood and drawers of water”. The province’s population surpassed the 1 100 000 mark in July, the highest in its history, and continues to grow unabated. The unemployment rate leads the country at about 3.5%, with many jobs going unfilled, especially skilled labour pertaining to home construction and municipal infrastructure.

Being out of the provincial environmental loop, I rely on the province’s State of the Environment Report (SOE) for updates to how the environment is faring, and the 2013 SOE would indicate to me that as a province, we have come a long way since I first moved here. From my initial perspective, environmental protection just got in the way of progress! Sustainable living meant getting food on the table and a roof over your head.

In reading the latest report, Saskatchewan continues to do things right with respect to protecting the environment. For example, farmers in 2011 zero-tilled 70.1% in preparation for seeding, as opposed to only 60.2% in 2006. Between 2007 and 2011, 12,229 tonnes of electronic waste were recycled. In 2012, 87% of all beverage containers were recycled, and finally there was a 17% reduction in water consumption in 22 watersheds between 2007-2011.

Suffice to say, environment matters in Saskatchewan, and with the provincial economy performing as it is, it behooves all of us here to keep a vigilant eye out. Now if I could only find a volunteer to write up what he or she is doing in terms of their professional environmental work!